

Blessed Death!

This morning as we focus on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus I want to take us to the Revelation given to John, the Apocalypse and the unveiling of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will start with a negative, but it contrasts and leads us to the positive. Lets turn to the Book of Revelation chapter 14 beginning in verse 9. Please stand for the reading of the Word of God and may it bring honor and glory to Him, who is the most Holy God. Brother **DAVID** please read, “And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.’ ¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’ ” Please be seated. Thank you David.

My beloved, this passage is just a glimpse of the terrifying portion of Scripture describing the time when our Lord Jesus returns to bring to an end the period known as the great tribulation spoken of in Matthew 24. At Jesus’ second coming He will judge the wicked of the earth, and establish His glorious eternal

kingdom. The judgments in this chapter are only a small portion of the judgments that are described in the Book of Revelation. These judgments start in chapter 6 and they run all the way through chapter 19 where in we read of judgment after judgment.

Blessed Tribulation

Many of these judgments focus on that seven-year period called the great tribulation, that period in which hell spews forth demons that up to this time have been bound. They are set loose on the earth to accompany those demons that already occupy the earth and are in our midst. At this time Satan makes these demons active in ways that has never been done before. The restraint that God has on Satan is released or removed and as the saying goes “all hell breaks loose” on earth. Satan lifts up the worst ruler the world has ever known, which is saying a lot as one thinks of Nero, Hitler and Stalin, but Satan establishes the Antichrist and his subordinate the False Prophet. They wreak havoc on the earth and massacre believers wherever they are found.

Satan is doing his worst damage in human history and God is also releasing His most fierce judgment. It is an unspeakably horrible time. Jesus said, “... the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.” (Matthew 24:6b-7) Never has there been a time like it. Jesus continued in verse 13, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.” (Mt. 24:13-14) Even during this horrific time the gospel will continue to be preached. Believers will suffer but endure to the end by their faith given to

them by God. Jesus continues speaking,²¹ “For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”²² And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” (Mt. 24:21-22) At the end of the tribulation before God pours out His final wrath He brings believers home to heaven - they will be raptured. There are verses in the letters of Paul to the Thessalonians indicating that believers will be raptured before God pours out His final wrath. In 1 Thessalonians we read, “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ **For God has not destined us for wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep (alive or dead) **we might live with him.** ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:8-11) As believers we live with Christ now and eternally in His direct presence at our death. For a true believer death is only the beginning of eternal life.

The world rapidly changes as the tribulation progresses and the end nears. God unleashes judgments during this period of time that affect the earth. A fourth of the population of the world dies. Then, a third of the population of the world then dies. Celestial bodies careen and crash. Water is destroyed as the oceans, lakes and rivers are polluted. It is the worst of all times in human history. It is the accumulation of all the worst of times in a very brief intense period. At the heart of all of this, Satan is making his last attempt to get people to worship the Antichrist and God is unleashing His fury.

Blessed Indeed

Now that you are thinking just how terrible a time this will be I want you to see in the middle of this cyclone of judgment there is an eye in the storm and there is a calm found in verses 12 and 13 of Revelation 14. This is what I want us to focus on. Look again at verses 12 and 13, “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’ ”

John writes as he heard and is instructed, “Blessed are the dead.” That seems such a strange statement, it would be easier for us to understand, if he wrote, “Blessed are the living.” But, as we consider, “Blessed are the dead,” we might think the only people who would say such a strange thing would be terrorists who having been deceived by Satan and false religion to think that they will be blessed if they kill themselves with many other people. Remember, there are today those evil idealists who want to kill people in massive ways in order to create a utopia. We mourn for the people recently murdered in Brussels’. We pray for God to comfort the survivors. We pray people’s need for Jesus will be revealed. But, the scriptures are clear it will get worst. Which means we must get serious about sharing the gospel of our Lord Jesus for people’s eternity is at stake.

We saw the effort to create a master race society in the 20th century Europe where multiple millions of people were murdered. But for most people they do not see death as a blessing. They perceive death is the opposite of blessing. Everybody wants to avoid death for it is a curse. God tells Adam right

after the fall, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19) Adam is now mortal and will die and return to the earth, the curse of the fall. Death is the fate of all humans, but here in Revelation we read, “Blessed are the dead.”

What does blessed mean? The Greek word is *Makarios* and it means “happy”, “blissful”, “serene”, “fulfilled”, so the dead in the Lord have complete bliss. What this tells us is that there is life after death. Death is not an unknown void, but for those belonging to God it is blessedness and brings satisfaction, and it is the fulfillment of Christ’s resurrection. In death there is the reality of the saints living with Christ fully content and serene. Death is a blessing for as John wrote, “Blessed are the dead.” It says in verse 13, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” This blessing is what our Lord has provided for us through His resurrection. Jesus said, “Because I live, you also will live.” (John 14:19) Paul wrote, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” (*All means all those who are believers. Paul is not speaking all in the sense of all mankind.*) Continuing in verse 23, “But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming.” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23) Christ rose first and we are to follow either by our death or by rapture. Revelation specifically and the Bible as a whole gives a direr picture of what happens to those **not** belonging to Christ. However, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”

This promise of blessing in death is very critical to understand because the ones to whom it is given, the saints referred to here, are the very saints in that future

time of tribulation. How future? We do not know, it may be near. However, when the tribulation comes the saints are in the middle of persecution. The believing community will suffer the very worst persecution ever known in human history. They are in the midst of the worst time in the history of the world. They are in the growing holocaust of not millions but trillions and it is the summation of all holocausts. They are in a time when everything is being crushed under the power of Satan or the judgment power of God. They are in the greatest time of slaughter the world has ever known. They are in the greatest time of martyrdom believers have ever suffered. But, but, the gospel will be preached and people will be saved to the glory of God! Martyrs will not die in vain, because of the assurance by Christ's resurrection.

There are two realities that contribute to the blessedness of those who die in the Lord. Number one, how they live and number two, how they die. Let's talk about how they live from the text of verse 12.

Blessed Endurance

Look at verse 12, “[Here is a call for the endurance or perseverance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.](#)” The death of a believer, the one who dies in the Lord, is blessed because of how that believer has lived. Here is the point we need to understand; believers live with endurance or perseverance. Look at that phrase, “[Here is a call for the endurance or perseverance of the saints.](#)” It's found here in our passage we are focusing on in chapter 14 and also in chapter 13, verse 10, where the first beast is unleashed and speaks blasphemies against God and persecutes the saints, we read “[Here is a call for the endurance or perseverance and faith of the saints.](#)” We also found John

speaking of endurance and perseverance in our study of 1 John chapter 5, “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes *and perseveres* the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5) Faith is key to producing perseverance, faith given by God the Father and powered by God the Spirit.

Here in Revelation among persecution and death we find a beatitude, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” I want you to understand this is not a command and this is not a suggestion and this is not a mandate. This is a statement of fact. True saints persevere. By the power of God, true believers will endure for their faith is a gift from God and is empowered by God. Beatitudes often encourage people in the face of adversary.

The Psalms are full of encouraging beatitudes, the very first verse of the first Psalm says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked ... ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD...” “Blessed” is used 51 times in the Psalms alone. Beatitudes are found throughout both the Old and New Testaments to encourage the saints and one can find seven in Revelation.

We have the wonderful beatitudes of Matthew chapter 5 that will continue to be true during the tribulation as well as for believers throughout history. Please turn to Matthew chapter 5 and follow as I read what our Lord spoke almost 2 thousands years ago beginning in verse 3. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. God’s people have always been those who are poor to this world in the sense they are afflicted, persecuted and at the same time living by the Spirit of God they will inherit heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who

mourn, for they shall be comforted. This compliments the “poor in spirit” for they will be comforted even though the world hates true believers and because of this hatred believers suffer. ⁵ **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.** Believers are meek or gentle in the face of persecution. They do not seek revenge. ⁶ **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.** The Bible is the spiritual food that satisfies a believers life. ⁷ **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.** Christians are called to good works of feeding and clothing the poor. Christians live lives that bless others both saved and unsaved. Mercy is fruit of the Spirit. ⁸ **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.** ⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.** ¹⁰ **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** ¹¹ **Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.** ¹² **Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** We are blessed because Jesus conquered death by His resurrection. We are blessed because God gives us the Holy Spirit to live within us. Verse 12 tells us why the saints throughout history and during the great tribulation at the close of history are able to rejoice in persecution because “**your reward is great in heaven.**” What is your reward in heaven? It is eternal life in the presence of the Holy God. For a Christian death is a blessing whether their death is natural and in their old age or unnatural and untimely and short because of disease or martyrdom. Why? Because, Jesus is God and He has conquered all evil, all sin and all death. God’s plan is playing out in history, but God is outside of time and space and history, and in heaven it is already complete. In the future history during the tribulation Satan and his demons “**will make war on the Lamb,**

and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” (Revelation 17:14) We can believe and be comforted not by this terrible time of tribulation, but in the fact Jesus has already conquered Satan in the realm of heaven and so what we are reading is fact and completely true, it just has not played out in our history yet. John verifies this by what he saw, ⁸“And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, (Why can they say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty” – because of what we read at the end of verse 8) the Lord God Almighty, **who was and is and is to come!**”” Christ is eternal and outside of time and He has always been. Let me continue to read, verse nine, “And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”” (Revelation 4:8-11) All of these verses help us understand who Christ is and why as His saints, His children, we are able to understand John’s saying in Revelation 14:13, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” We are the “Blessed” as believers both in living and dying because Jesus rose from the tomb. As I have said, there are two realities that contribute to the blessedness of those who die in the Lord. Number one, how they live and number two, how they die. We have seen how our living in Christ is important to us, our church and even to the

unbelieving world.

Blessed Dying

Now we explore, “[Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.](#)” This speaks to the saints of the tribulation. Chapter 11 of Hebrews speaks of the saints of the past: Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham and tells of their lives. Verse 13 says this, “[These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.](#)” What does it mean, “[not having received the things promised?](#)” The promised Messiah had not come during their lifetimes, yet they believed, lived and died in faith. Chapter 11 continues by describing how the saints were persecuted, tortured and put to death. Yet, we also read they lived honoring God and accomplishing great things in the name of God. Chapter 11 ends with, “[And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,](#) ⁴⁰ [since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.](#)” (Hebrews 11:39-40) Death of saints throughout history and in the future is a blessing because how they lived and how they died. Jesus freed us from sin by His death and resurrection. At death, we, too will be resurrected to the presence of Christ. Both those Old Testament saints who believed in the promise of the coming Messiah and New Testament saints who have received the promised Messiah, Jesus the Christ, are blessed in death. In Psalm 116 the writer expressed, “[Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.](#)” (Psalm 116:15) This is true because the death of the faithful, those who remain faithful even unto death, bring honor and glory to God. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15 Paul wrote, “[When the perishable puts on the imperishable,](#)

and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55) Dying faithful to the Lord is victory, it is triumph and we are blessed!

How did the martyrs remain faithful throughout history? Did they seek martyrdom? No, but they did not retreat from it either! Stephen is the first and he is a great example. We read in Acts, “Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.” (Acts 6:8) Of course the world hates those who are faithful to Christ. The Jews arrested Stephen and they held a hasty illegal trial with false witnesses. Stephen boldly defends the gospel of the risen Christ using the Old Testament Scriptures and by the power of the Holy Spirit. He finishes his defense and then says, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” The Jews took Stephen outside the city walls. “As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:56, 59-60) Stephen was empowered to preach the gospel by the faith God had given him and by the Holy Spirit that dwelt within him and by Jesus the risen Savior. So has it been with all the martyrs, some of which were; Stephen, Andrew, Simon Peter, Polycarp, Wycliffe, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jim Elliot and Kenji Goto who was beheaded in 2015 by Islamic State or ISIL militants in Syria. More Christians have been martyred in the last 100 years than the combined 1900 years prior. They died blessed because they believed in the resurrected Christ.

Blessed Assurance

My beloved, be assured, do not fear the future. Do not doubt if you will have the strength to be faithful to the end. Just like Stephen, the first martyr, God will give you the strength and courage to be faithful. We do not seek martyrdom. We seek to live as faithful witnesses of who Jesus is to this corrupt world. But, we will not retreat and forsake Jesus Christ - we will remain faithful. Jesus said to John to bolster his faith, **“Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life... The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.”** (Revelation 2:10-11) Jesus wants us to live life to the fullest, not fearing the future or death. First, Jesus conquered death by rising from the grave and then He gives us the Holy Spirit to make living as Christians possible in a fallen world. Hear the truth of God recorded in The Revelation of Jesus Christ, ¹²“Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’ ” (Revelation 14:12-13) Live for Christ without fear because Christ lives! The tomb is empty! **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!”** Why? Because, Jesus is risen – He is risen indeed! Our redeemer lives!